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HEIGHT LIMITS IN NORTHEASTERN SAN FRANCISCO

DEPARTMENT OF CITY PLANNING
CITY AND COUNTY OF SAN FRANCISCO



SAN FRANCISCO DEPARTMENT OF CITY PLANNING • OCTOBER 1963

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"Here I speak of a matter that in all our American communities has been until recently far too much neglected. Local pride ought above all to center, so far as the material objects are concerned, about the determination to give the surroundings of the community nobility, dignity, beauty We Americans spend far too much of our early strength and time upon injuring our landscapes, and far too little upon endeavoring to beautify our towns and cities."



CITY AND COUNTY OF SAN FRANCISCO
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October 1963

Mr. Louis M. Cole, President
City Planning Commission
100 Larkin Street
San Francisco, California

Dear Mr. Cole:

Transmitted herewith in compliance with the request of the Board of Supervisors and the directive of the City Planning Commission is a report summarizing the staff findings and recommendations resulting from the study of the problem of height limits along the northern waterfront and in the northeastern part of the city.

It is intended that this report and the recommended Planning Code amendments, submitted separately, will serve as a basis for fruitful public review and debate on the vital issue of height limits in this part of San Francisco.

Very truly yours,

James R. McCarthy
James R. McCarthy
Director of Planning

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San Francisco (Calif.).
Dept. of City Planning.
Height limits in
northeastern San
[1963]

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1 INTRODUCTION

Background and Purpose of the Report

On May 14, 1962 the Board of Supervisors of the City and County of San Francisco adopted legislation imposing a 40-foot building height limit on 82 blocks at the northeast corner of the city. The legislation included instructions to the Department of City Planning to continue the study of the problem of height control in the northern waterfront area, and to make a report to the Board of Supervisors by October 1, 1963. This report is made in compliance with these instructions.

The shape of the land and its early development and use are the underlying causes of this legislation. The piers and low warehouses of the waterfront have been an unobtrusive foreground to the views of ships and bay, islands and mountains framed at street ends and by windows of the dwellings that crowd the slopes of Telegraph and Russian Hills, or seen in full sweep from bridge to bridge from the plaza under Coit Tower. The immediate cause of the legislation was the suc-

cessful application to construct a 17-story apartment building on the site of the Fontana warehouse, along North Point Street, between Polk Street and Van Ness Avenue, and the implied threat that this structure, rising 250 feet above the bay, was but the first of a series that would ring the waterfront blocking views both from the hills and of the hills, thus changing the whole pattern and aspect of this part of the city. To combat this threat, application was made to the City Planning Commission on March 24, 1961 to establish a 40-foot height limit district in the northern waterfront area east of Laguna Street, and north of, at different points, Lombard, Chestnut and Francisco Streets. Hearings and action on this case by the City Planning Commission and the Board of Supervisors took more than a year, and involved a special study of a substitute height restriction formula offered by the opposition to the 40-foot limit. Although this proposal was shown to be too liberal, and did not afford the protection sought by the

controversial application, it seemed to point the way to the possibility of a more flexible method of height control which might achieve the desired result of protecting the broad and open views that are part of the city's heritage, and would also permit variations from the uncompromising 40-foot limitation. This led to the action by the Board of Supervisors establishing the 40-foot limit and instructing the Department of City Planning to investigate alternate methods of height controls and to develop a comprehensive height control plan for the study area.

The principal objective of this study is to establish an equitable means to protect and preserve, in the public interest, one of the unique attributes of San Francisco: the sweeping panorama of land, water and distant mountains as seen from various public areas and especially from the crest of Telegraph Hill, and conversely the views from the shoreline or the bay of the dramatic land forms, accentuated by tall structures along the ridge tops rising above the

low horizontal foreground, and to protect where legally possible the views and prospects long enjoyed from numerous private properties on the hillsides and ridge tops where property values are closely related to view potential.

11 THE STUDY AREA

The study area was expanded beyond the limits of the recently legislated height control district, west to the Presidio and south to Broadway, thus including the Marina and the east-west ridge of Pacific Heights as well as the Van Ness Avenue corridor, the Russian Hill ridge which runs southeasterly from the bay shore, the North Beach valley, Telegraph Hill, and the waterfront from Pier 7 westerly to Fisherman's Wharf, Aquatic Park, Fort Mason, Gas House Cove and the Yacht Harbor back to the Presidio.

The map on pages 12 & 13 shows this land mass, dominated by three hills ranging in height from 350 feet at the southwest corner of Pacific Heights to the 285 foot elevation of Telegraph Hill; and separated from the bay by a flatland perimeter varying in width from more than half a mile at the Marina to only a few feet where Russian Hill and the Fort Mason promontory drop to the sea.

The map also shows the rigid street grid which has been imposed on this hilly terrain, resulting in several impassible and many steep gradient streets. Interruptions to the grid occur in the Marina and at Fort Mason, the diagonal of Columbus Avenue at the base of Russian Hill, which parallels the ridge, and the loop of Telegraph Hill Boulevard. There are many narrow alleys in the area, but most of the main streets are 68'-9" in width. Van Ness Avenue, which is 125' wide, Columbus Avenue, The Embarcadero, Lombard Street and Marina Boulevard are the principal and obvious exceptions.

Six of the special height-limit districts in the study area, shown on the map on page 14, are regulated by the Building Code. The recently established height-limit district, "G" on the subject map, is the first such to be established under the Planning Code.

The map on page 15 shows the existing zoning in the study area. The large public areas are included in the P zone, created by the Board of Supervisors since this study started. There are five residential classifications in the area, and C-1, C-M and M-1 zones.

R-1, R-2, and R-3 districts have height limits ranging from 35 feet to 40 feet for dwellings, though not for "churches, schools, hospitals, institutions and permitted public buildings."

In the remaining districts, however, if no specific height-limit prevails, building heights are limited only indirectly, as a result of the maximum ratios of floor area to lot area established in the Planning Code for buildings in each of these districts: 4.6:1 in R-4, 10.0:1 in R-5, 3.6:1 in C-2, 9.0:1 in C-M, and 5.0:1 in M-1.

The effect of these floor area ratio provisions, which control the overall bulk of a building, is that a building that masses its bulk close to the ground by high coverage of the lot may not rise as high as a slender building with low lot coverage.

New private residential buildings may be constructed in all the zoning districts included within the study area except the M-1 district, in which only commercial and light industrial uses are permitted, and in the P district which is reserved for lands in public ownership and use.

The maps on page 9 show land use in 1920 and 1960 in the most critical portion of the study area. For the western part of the area, - the Marina, Cow Hollow, and the slopes of Pacific Heights - the general character of land use was established when the first zoning ordinance for San Francisco was adopted in 1921. About 1925 the first multi-story apartment houses thrust upward on the skyline of Pacific Heights and regulations governing height limits of buildings west of Van Ness Avenue were added to the Building Code.

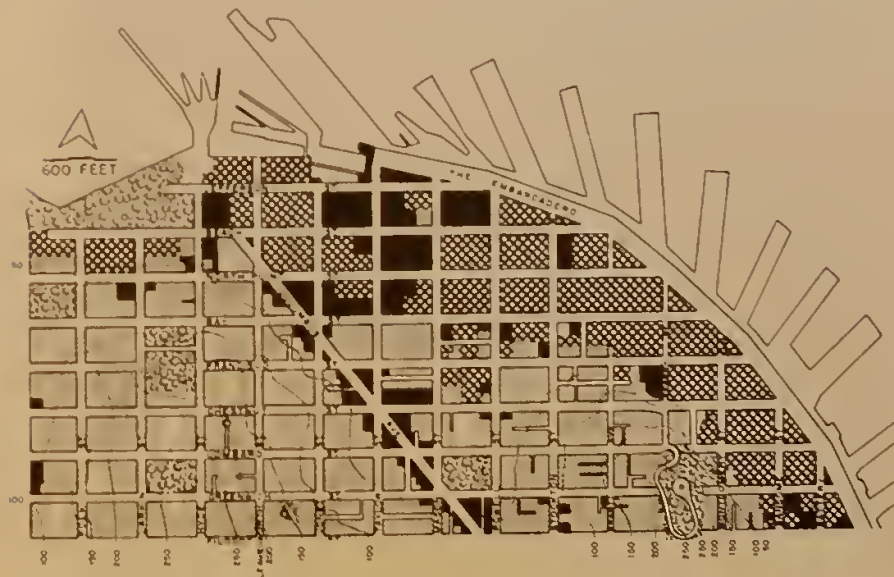
The area west of Van Ness is almost entirely residential in use and although predominantly multi-family, there is a concentration of single family houses on the slope of Pacific Heights near

1920 LAND USE



the Presidio and on several streets in the Marina. Portions of Union, Fillmore and Chestnut Streets serve the local business and shopping needs, and several blocks on Lombard Street have uses oriented to automobile traffic entering or leaving the City by way of the Golden Gate Bridge.

East of Van Ness Avenue the ridge of Russian Hill also became the site of multi-story apartment houses in the late 1920's although the more significant land use changes in the lower flatlands were to occur following 1946. In contrast to the area west of Van Ness Avenue, here are to be found more diversified and intensive uses and almost no single-family districts. The vicinities of Chestnut and Hyde Streets and Green and Jones Streets each form a high-rise apartment district unrestricted in height. Other apartment houses, lower in height and density occupy the slopes. Telegraph Hill is similarly developed with three-story apartment houses; a series of 40-foot height limits initiated in 1945 blankets the area east of Grant Avenue and prevents the erection



1960 LAND USE

of tall structures over most of the hill.

Polk Street north to Filbert Street and the North Beach valley between Russian and Telegraph Hills provide for community business and shopping, with the latter also being a center of entertainment for the Bay Area.

The flatlands north of Francisco Street have experienced continual, but almost unnoticed change until recently, due principally to the relatively low buildings. While the amount of land used for industrial purposes reached its peak about 1937, it has since declined to a pre-1920 level, having been replaced principally by commercial uses related to the activities of Fisherman's Wharf.

Recreational facilities along or near the waterfront are concentrated in two areas. West of Van Ness Avenue are found the Marina Green, Funston Field, St. Francis Yacht Club and the projected boat harbor at Gas House Cove. The second area is the entire waterfront extending from the Municipal Pier at Aquatic Park eastward past Fisherman's Wharf to Pier 43 where

the Balclutha lies at anchor. While many of the facilities here are private commercial enterprises, the area has become a major recreational attraction for residents and visitors alike.

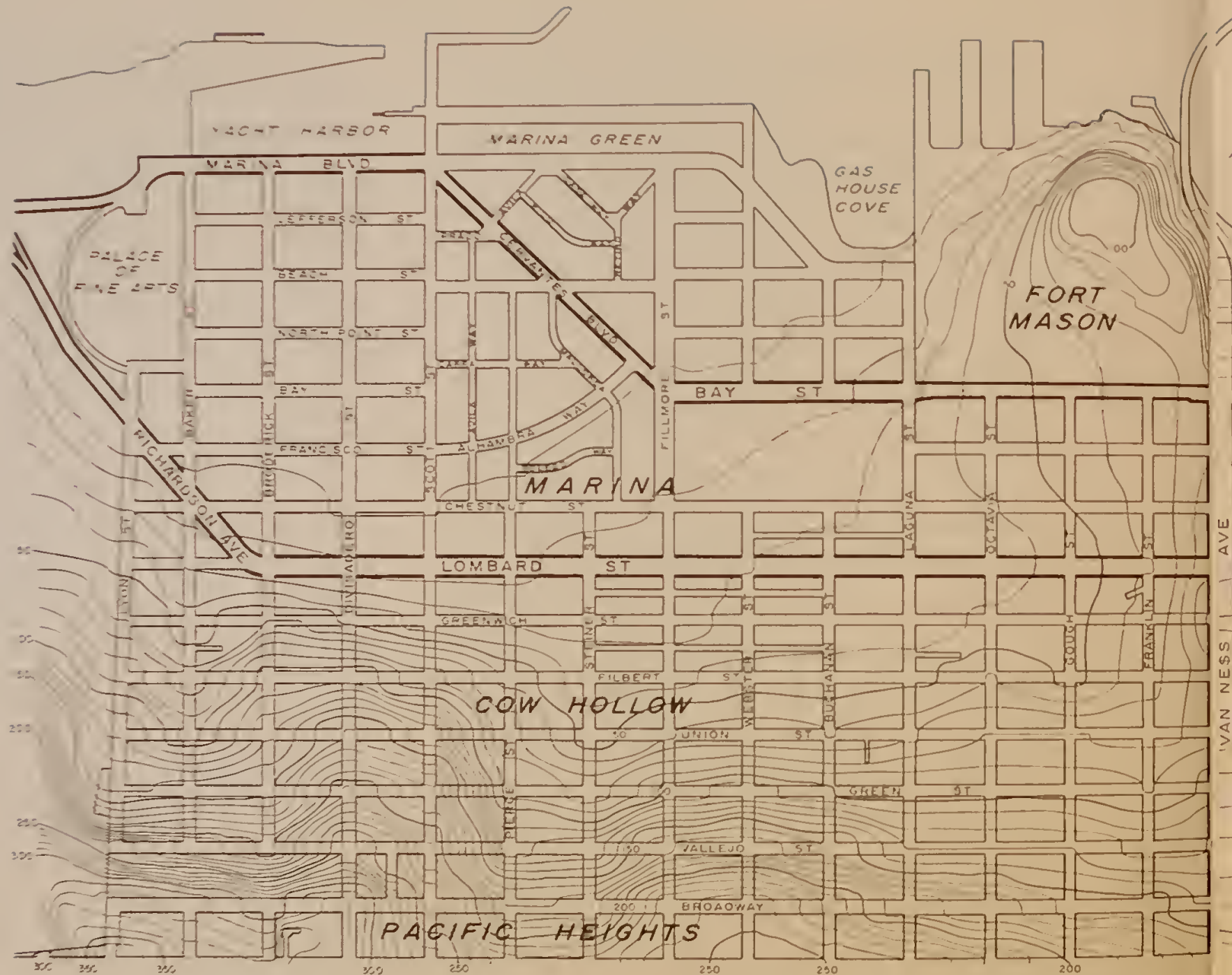
Through the State Division of Beaches and Parks, Aquatic Park with its Maritime Museum has been enhanced by the development of the block to the east as a Victorian park. Announced plans for the conversion of the Haslett Warehouse into a transportation museum, the reconstruction of the Hyde Street Pier and anchoring of historic ships in the lagoon will increase the attractiveness of the area to greater numbers of people.

In addition to the recent public improvements of a recreational nature it is significant to note the increase in number of restaurants and other private businesses associated with Fisherman's Wharf. The first motel in the area consisted of 25 units erected in 1954; the second was built in 1959, the third in 1961 and a fourth is under construction, bringing the total to approximately 400 units. If one is familiar with pre-

World War II Fisherman's Wharf and the area today, he is aware of the extension of related facilities south along Taylor Street and east and west along Beach Street. Figures from the State Department of Employment reveal that in 1958 the commercial and industrial uses of the northern waterfront area provided over 6000 persons with employment.

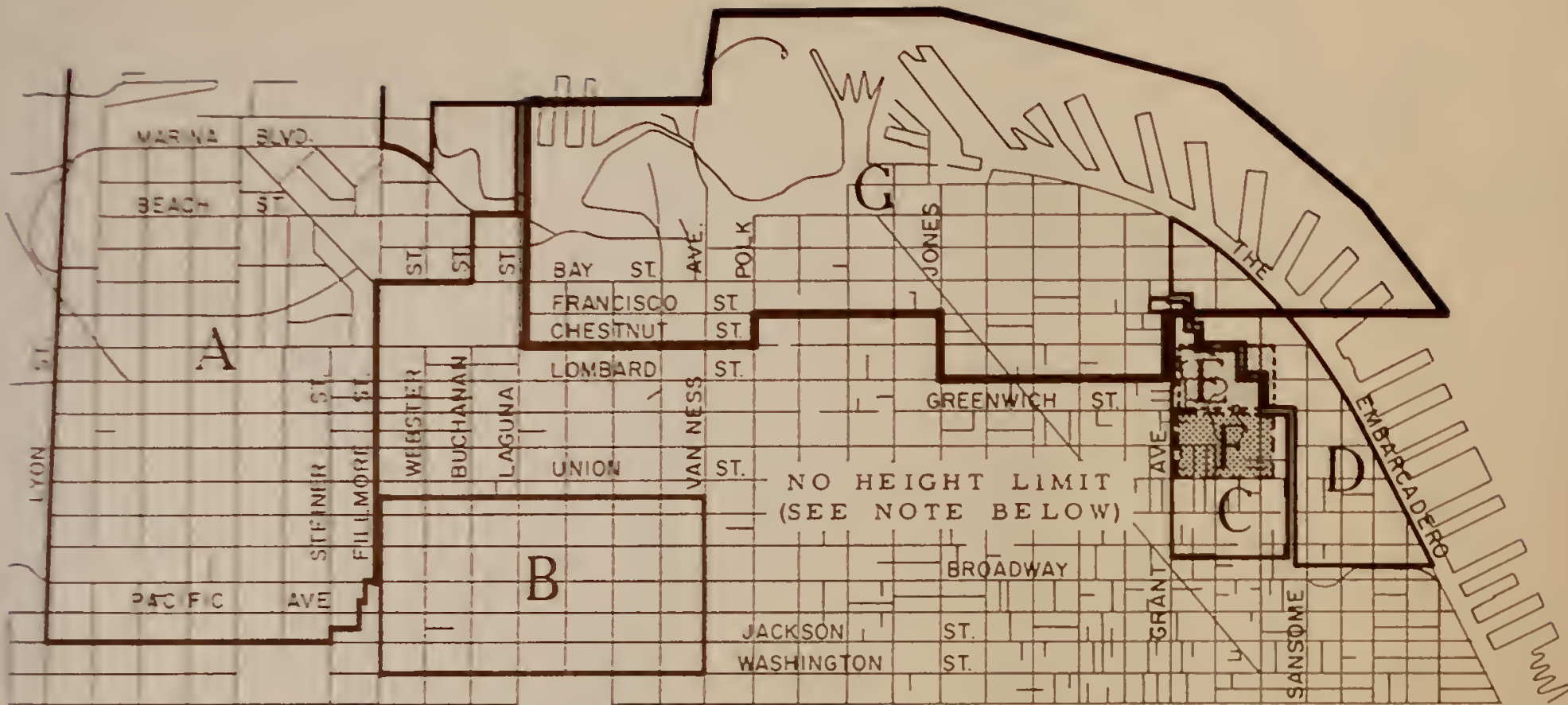
The last of the study area maps in this series, on pages 16 and 17, indicates the view potential from private properties in the area east of Fillmore Street. This map was made from observation in the field, and by stereoscopic examination of aerial surveys which lends a third dimensional illusion to the terrain and buildings. It was assumed that present views from the existing structures are governed by topography, orientation of the lot and location of the house on the lot, and by absence of view blocking structures in the vicinity. The study area is divided to show the probable principal direction of view from the majority of parcels within the various divisions.

This map shows that there is no principal direction of view from the hillside properties in the study area. Some properties have no view at all, but some views, particularly from high structures, are truly panoramic. Views from other properties are oriented to various points of the compass. While views on Pacific Heights are generally to the north, the views from the slopes of Telegraph Hill follow the compass around the hill, as do views from the crescent shaped ridge of Russian Hill. Thus high-rise structures any where in the flatland perimeter of the northeast section of the city will intrude into views from some properties both public and private, on the adjacent hills.





NORTHEASTERN SAN FRANCISCO



EXISTING SPECIAL HEIGHT LIMITATION DISTRICTS

DISTRICT	HEIGHT LIMIT	DATE ESTABLISHED
A	41 feet	May 2, 1927 and February 2, 1931
B	115 feet	September 25, 1933
C	40 feet	February 5, 1945 and November 13, 1956
D	34 feet	April 3, 1946
E	270 feet above city base	July 5, 1932
F	290 feet above city base	July 5, 1932
G	40 feet	May 16, 1962

NOTE: Under the City Planning Code, height limits apply automatically in R-1-D and R-1 districts (35 feet), in R-2 and R-3 districts (40 feet). In all other zoning districts there are no specified height limits and the bulk of a building is controlled by the allowable floor area ratio.



EXISTING ZONING - OCTOBER 1963

P	Public Lands
R-1-D	Single Family Residential - Detached
R-1	Single Family Residential
R-2	Two Family Residential
R-3	Multiple Family Residential - Low Density
R-4	Multiple Family Residential - Medium Density
R-5	Multiple Family Residential - High Density
C-1	Neighborhood Shopping District
C-2	Community Shopping District
C-M	General Commercial District
M-1	Light Industrial District
M-2	Heavy Industrial District

AREA	NAME OF DISTRICT
A	Marina Island (Fillmore Street to Van Ness Avenue) No views except from taller buildings
BC	Pacific Heights Views to the north
DF	Northern Waterfront Flatland No views except from taller buildings
G	Russian Hill (west slope) Views to the west
EH1	Russian Hill (north and east slopes) Views to the north, northeast and east
J	Telegraph Hill (north-westerly slope) Views to the west, northwest and north
K	North Beach No views except from taller buildings
L	Telegraph Hill (west slope) Views to the west, southwest and south
M	Telegraph Hill (east slope) Views to the east
N	Embarcadero Flatland (north of Broadway) No views except from taller buildings



Public Areas

Properties with View Potentials
under Existing Conditions

Vacant Parcels and Properties
without Views



200

PRIVATE



PROPERTIES WITH VIEW POTENTIALS

III METHOD OF PRESENTATION

In the course of this study it has frequently been suggested that a three dimensional model of the study area would be required to illustrate the problems and solutions under consideration.

Such a working model was used in the early part of the study, but it was found that a model of

manageable size for an area so large and varied can at best present only a general bird's eye view, showing land forms and space relationships. It cannot describe the vistas or general outlook of the viewer standing on hillside, ridge top, shoreline or boat deck. Nor can it impart



to the observer the overwhelming scale of some of these high-rise structures when seen from ground level. This can be demonstrated by a picture taken of a model of the winning design for the Golden Gateway Redevelopment Project which was laid out with generous open area and superb aesthetic surroundings. This same group of well designed and spaciouly sited

towers presents an entirely different picture when viewed from the southeastern slope of Telegraph Hill.

In order to reflect most accurately conditions as seen on the ground, photography was chosen as the best method to illustrate the various aspects of the northern waterfront height problem.



WEST OF VAN NESS AVENUE

The pictures on these pages show some of the visual excitement of the area. At other places in the report, buildings of various heights are superimposed on these views to demonstrate some of the problems and suggest solutions.

The existing 40-foot building height limitation on most of the Marina flatland has retained the openness and depth of view from the hillsides above, and has preserved the natural relationship between the hills of the city, the bay, and the hills and mountains across the bay which typify San Francisco.

The gas holder on Bay Street illustrates the intrusive effect of high-rise structures near the water's edge.



EAST OF VAN NESS AVENUE

Within this small area of the City is concentrated the entire spectrum of San Francisco's urban and natural panoramas.

The North Beach valley is surrounded on either side by numerous view oriented buildings clinging to the hillside. Telegraph Hill is crowned by Coit Tower, a public monument which, as the only high structure on the hill, singularly identifies it. The long ridge of Russian Hill is topped by a serrated mass of tall structures accenting the heights of the hill. A new 25-story apartment tower perched half way down the hill appears to give warning of a possible invasion of high-rise buildings into the unprotected open valley below.



From the bay or lowland perimeter of the City, the clear visual statement of the dramatic quality of San Francisco's famous skyline is

unfolded. The land form is accentuated by tall buildings on the hill tops, and supported by a low horizontal base.



The Fontana Tower nearing completion and the identical tower authorized but not yet built gives a sharp impression of the changed relation

between bay, shoreline, and hills imparted by high structures along the lowlands.



Along the cable car route traversing Russian Hill are the exciting and unexpected glimpses of the bay, the Golden Gate and the valleys of the City and of Telegraph Hill that Gelett Burgess proclaimed in his famous "Ballad of the Hyde Street Grip".





*North Beach to Tenderloin,
over Russian Hill,
The grades are something giddy,
and the curves are fit to kill!
All the way to Market Street,
climbing up the slope,
Down upon the other side,
hanging to the rope!
But the view of San Francisco,
as you take the lurching dip!
There is plenty of excitement
on the Hyde Street Grip!*



It is from the crest of Telegraph Hill that the endless variety and beauty of the urban and natural views are fully exposed for the enjoyment of all the people. This priceless aesthetic heritage should be preserved in the public interest.



To the southwest is Nob Hill delineated by a crown of tall residential towers. The western skyline is dominated by apartments rising above the curving plateau of Russian Hill accentuating

the difference in elevation between the ridge and the North Beach valley. Along these hill tops tall buildings enhance the topographic and urban features of the city.



Residents and visitors alike go to the public observation area on Telegraph Hill for the panoramic view of the Golden Gate Bridge, the visual symbol of the entrance to the magnificent landlocked harbor, and of the contrasts of concentrated residential, commercial and industrial buildings in the foreground,



the breadth of the island-studded bay, the tranquil natural slopes of the Marin hills, some dramatically unchanged by urban development, the lofty splendor of Mount Tamalpais in the distance,



the pulsing maritime activities along the nearby shoreline, and the sweep of the Bay Bridge, the longest of the bay crossings. This publicly accessible view belongs to all the people. This view is unique to San Francisco, unmatched anywhere in the world. This view is San Francisco. It is worthy of protection.



IV PROBLEMS IN THE STUDY AREA

These sweeping views of mountains and sea and sky, the natural beauty which is "San Francisco's greatest single asset" and which by circumstance and design has been enhanced by the hand of man, the happiness which these engender, are part of the priceless heritage which many San Franciscans wish to preserve. The Declaration of Independence has given prestige to the "pursuit of happiness," and there is legal precedence which allows aesthetics to be at least a contributing cause to restrictions on the use of private property. Further traditional causes for such legislation are evident in analysis of the study area.

The traffic and parking problems which already exist in the area -- along commercial streets in the Marina, on the steep streets of Russian and Telegraph Hills, on Columbus Avenue in the narrow North Beach valley, along Broadway, and at Fisherman's Wharf are familiar and frustrating. Although public

action is being taken to relieve some of these problems, recommendations for further alleviative measures are under consideration, and studies are underway to lessen the traffic burden in the area, it seems apparent that the replacement of existing three and four-story buildings of low or medium density occupancy, or moderately intensive use, with uses of high intensity, will aggravate the present traffic problems.

The principle in the Land Use Section of the Master Plan that population densities should be distributed with particular regard to topography and to view potential is reflected in the residential zoning of the study area where the height-limited R-1, R-2 and R-3 districts are assigned to valleys and steep hill sides, and the R-4 and R-5 classifications, which under the floor area ratio formula permit high-rise structures, are generally reserved for the ridge and hill tops.

Special height controls, however, are necessary companions to the zoning ordinance in order to achieve the aims of the Master Plan. The height provisions for the commercial and industrial zoning classifications might thwart these aims unless further controls are exerted, and height controls are necessary where a moderately high residential density is

desirable without the threat of destroying the integrity of an area by the intrusion of incongruous high structures. Through the years since 1927 special height control districts have been created in response to particular circumstances. This has resulted in a somewhat haphazard and sometimes overlapping pattern of controls, and it has also left certain areas unprotected.

For instance, there is today no prohibition on the erection of a wall of high buildings along the south side of Chestnut Street, east of Fillmore Street.



Nor will existing restrictions prevent the construction of skyscrapers along the west side of Grant Avenue south of Lombard Street where the nearest point is only 135 feet below and 575 feet westerly of the paved observation area on top of Telegraph Hill.

Looking northwest from Coit Tower observation plaza. This view indicates the resulting condition if a building equal in size to the Royal Towers (Green Street, east of Taylor Street) were to be erected at the southwest corner of Lombard Street and Grant Avenue. This area currently is not subject to any height limitations. (Solid line represents eye level . . . approximately the tenth floor of the building.)



The possibilities shown in the two preceding pages are actualities today as shown in the two photographs below - both illustrating view-obliterating structures erected on the lower elevations.



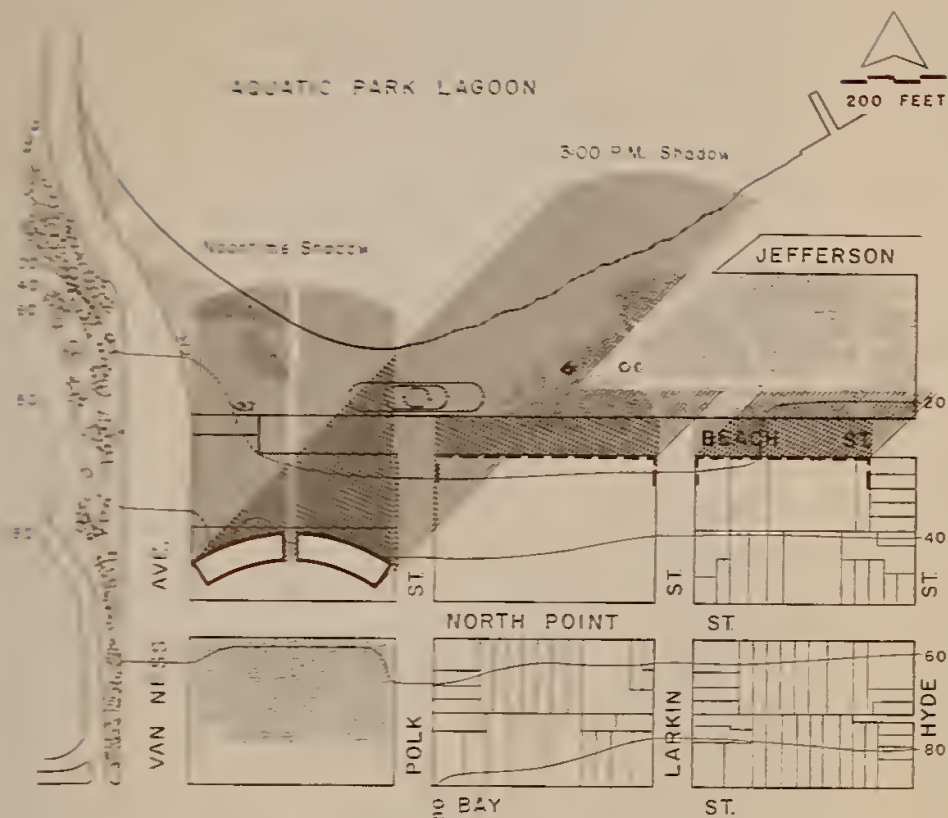
These are in addition to the high-rise building under construction at North Point Street and Van Ness Avenue.



The problem of overcrowding if full advantage is taken of the permissiveness of the R-4 and R-5 zoning classifications, is also cause for concern. The 4.8 to 1 floor area ratio of the R-4 district would permit the construction in one block of three 25-story apartment towers similar to the Royal Towers shown in this picture, and a maximum of 568 dwelling units in each block.

In an R-5 district, the 10 to 1 floor area ratio would permit construction of at least six similar buildings on each block with a maximum permitted housing density of over 900 dwelling units. A group of such buildings in each block would completely overwhelm the present residential character of the neighborhood. To impose such population densities on steep hillside streets with limited accessibility would increase the present traffic and parking problem.



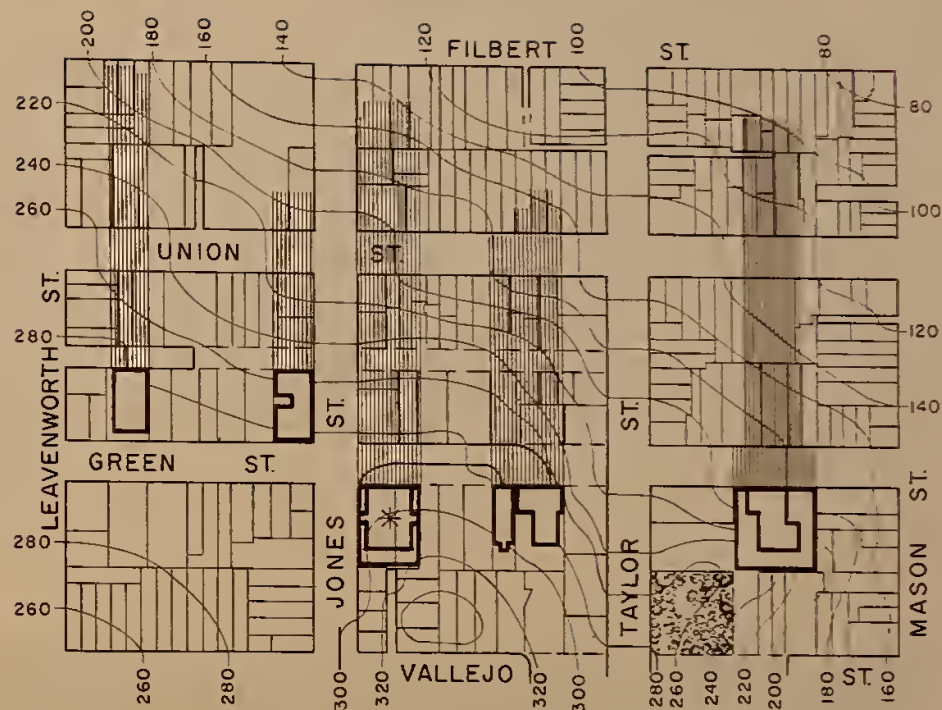


SHADOWS OVER THE AQUATIC PARK AREA

Noontime and 3 P.M. shadows on December 21. The Fontana Apartments are 196 feet tall. Other shadows represent buildings 40 feet tall along the south line of Beach Street.

Another problem which has become apparent in this study and which can be resolved in part by the application of special height controls is that of the long, deep shadows cast by high and bulky structures. The wall of the Fontana Towers which rises 196 feet above street grade on North Point Street, south of Aquatic Park, illustrates this problem as it affects a public area. The drawing shows the length of this tower shadow at noon on the first day of winter, and the position and size of the same shadow at 3 o'clock in the afternoon. Any additional tall structures along the southern boundary of this public open space will rob the rest of the park of sunshine.

Another aspect of this problem is illustrated by the long finger shadows of closely grouped high-rise structures on Green Street falling on the steep downhill slope toward North Beach. There are five tall buildings concentrated along this two and one-half block stretch and a sixth is under construction at the southeast corner of Jones and Green Streets. The hillside exaggerates the lengths of the shadows, as shown on the drawing copied from an aerial photograph taken in November of 1962. By December 21, the shadows will have increased in length by another 20 per cent. The possible intrusion of these tall buildings down the slope toward the North Beach area with its two or three-story multi-family structures would enlarge the area affected by such shadows. The loss of light and air and sunshine along the lower hillside would, in the long run, have the greatest detrimental effect on the residential character of the area. To localize this problem it will be necessary to impose progressively more restrictive height controls upon the descending contours.



SHADOWS CAST BY TALL BUILDINGS AT NOON
(NOVEMBER)



* High rise apartment structure (Ht. 327'-6") under construction with approximate shadow length superimposed.

V ALTERNATE PROPOSALS

During the months of this study various methods of controlling heights of buildings along the northern waterfront were considered in the attempt to find a solution that might permit the construction of tall buildings that would not injure the visual character of the area. Research uncovered no other city with building height limitations which has the same objectives as San Francisco.

Solutions considered in this study ranged from the simple one of exploring the effects of uniform but higher limitations, to solutions involving complex floor area ratio formulas, and air right controls. This picture shows in exaggerated circumstance the increasingly obliterating effect of uniform 65-foot, 84-foot and 105-foot height restrictions.



The more complex formulas when applied equally to all privately owned property were not safeguards against an inappropriate building, or pattern of buildings, appearing in an inappropriate location.

Likewise there is no way of establishing controls whereby proposed planned unit developments on private property can be evaluated without creating basic inequities in the use of such property, or permitting such haphazard intrusions as those shown in the picture below.



However, because of the extent of the Port Authority property and because it is in public ownership and can be subject to a master development plan whereby it will be possible to control the design and location of all buildings, it is, considered feasible that under certain circumstances the planned unit development provisions of the Planning Code may be applied here, to allow a few properly spaced and designed buildings to exceed the basic 40-foot height limitation.

Application of redevelopment processes in the privately owned portion of the waterfront area would create the same condition that applies in the Port Authority property, and permit control of the design and location of all structures in the area. However, there are no indications that the application of such processes could be justified here.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

VI CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The general conclusion reached is that no formula so far devised and explored will permit variations from the 40-foot height limitation on private building along the northern waterfront flatland, and still preserve to the general public the depth and breadth of view, the clear delineation of land forms, and the sweeping panoramas that are the present heritage and greatest asset of San Francisco. The dramatic qualities of views should not be diluted or dissipated by the occasional high buildings which could be constructed under any of the alternate proposals considered in this study.

The study also made evident that precise height limitations are necessary over the greater part of the study area in the interest of the general public welfare, not only for view preservation, but for control of the overcrowding and over intensive use of the land, which lead to the hazards of further traffic congestion, the unhealthy cutting off of light and air and sunshine,

as well as the destruction of the pleasant living qualities of the environment.

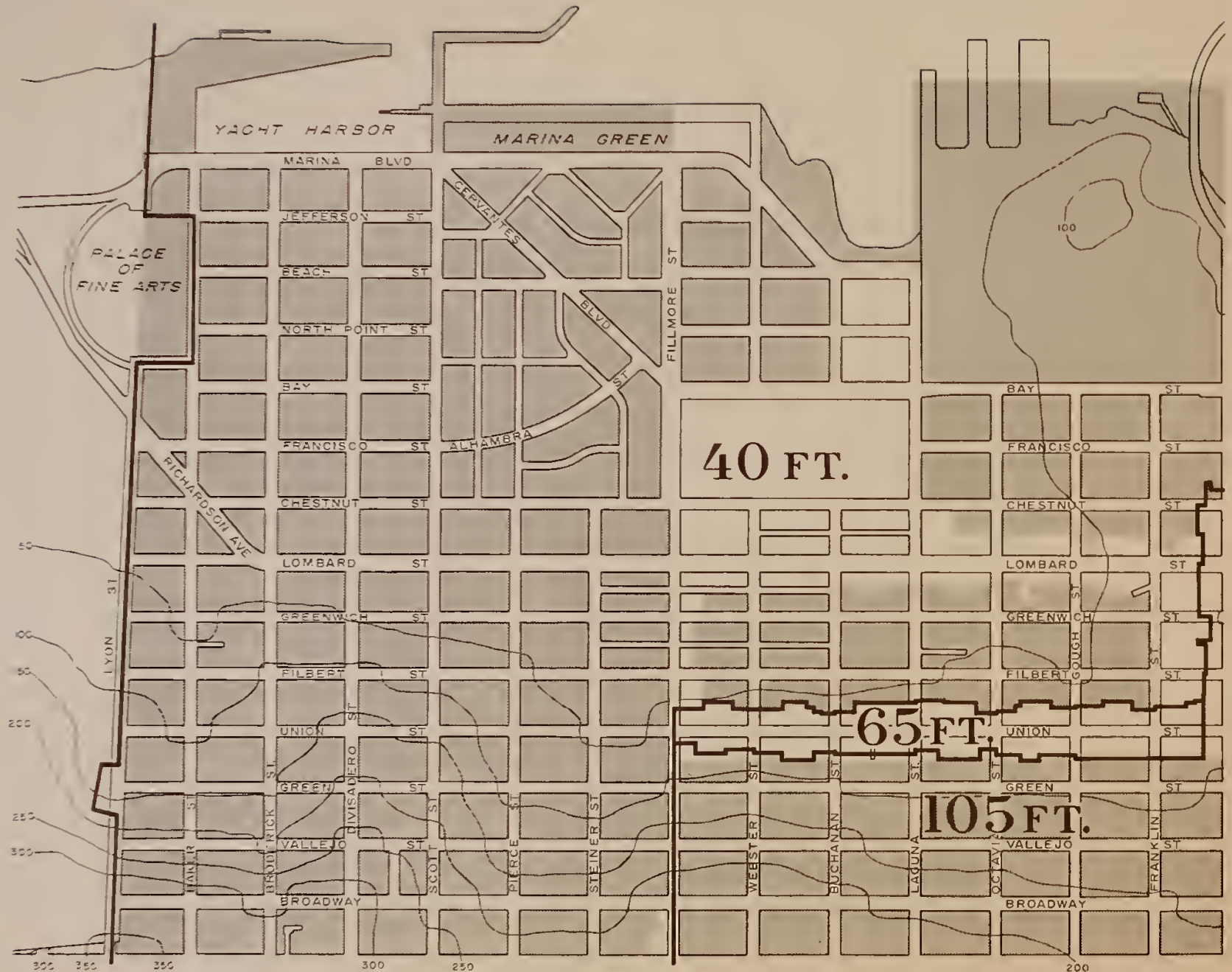
The specific assumptions developed for the study are that a comprehensive building heights control plan for the study area should:

1. Reflect recommendations of the land use section of the Master Plan assigning high-density, and the possibility of high-rise buildings, to accessible hilltops, medium density with height controls along the hillsides and reserving the lowland to low-density residential, commercial or industrial uses.
2. Prevent further aggravation of existing traffic or parking problems by controlling intensity of land use.
3. Insure sunlight and openness of outlook to public areas and hillsides wherever possible.

4. Establish height limitations that accent rather than blur the salient land forms.

The recommendations which follow are derived from these assumptions.

The map on the next pages shows the height limit districts which are proposed for the study area. Lot lines or zoning district boundaries as shown on the "Zoning Map of the City and County of San Francisco" at the date of this study are used for mid-block delineations of the districts recommended.



RECOMMENDED SPECIAL



HEIGHT LIMIT DISTRICTS

AREAS WHERE HEIGHT LIMITS ALREADY EXIST

40-foot District

The existing 40-foot height districts both east and west of Van Ness Avenue are expanded to include the level areas south of Chestnut Street and west of Laguna Street not covered by previous specific height restrictions, all of the waterfront lowlands north of Telegraph Hill not presently under special height control, the remainder of the hill itself, and the valley floor of North Beach.

The R-3 zoning in some of this expanded area exerts a measure of control, but the more specific limitation is considered an added safeguard to preserve the existing aspect of the flatland perimeter.

The 40-foot height limit as recommended would be a single district which is continuous across the northeastern sector of the city from the Presidio to the pier head line beyond Pier 7, and also flows into some gaps to the south which are loop holes in the present restrictions where the emergence of high-rise structures could

completely subvert the principal objective of this study.

For the purpose of this study, all Port Authority property on the water side of The Embarcadero in the study area is placed under the 40-foot height restriction. However, because of the public ownership and extent of the property, it is recommended that variations in the 40-foot height limitation on the water side of The Embarcadero from Pier 7 to the Hyde Street Pier may be considered by the City Planning Commission upon application for a planned unit development authorization, provided that such variations are in accordance with a master plan for the development of the waterfront area jointly approved by the San Francisco Port Authority and the City.

65-foot Districts

West of Van Ness Avenue a 65-foot limitation is proposed for the commercial district on Union Street from Fillmore Street to the

Van Ness Avenue frontage to make an orderly transition along the lower slopes of Pacific Heights from the level foreground to the taller buildings on the ridge above. East of Van Ness Avenue a similar 65-foot transition district is proposed along the eastern slope of Russian Hill, and on the east side of Columbus Avenue and north of Broadway at the base of Telegraph Hill.

The 65-foot height is already a specific limitation on certain classes of buildings in the Building Code.

84-foot District

The existing 84-foot district at the eastern base of Telegraph Hill has been retained from Francisco Street south to Broadway. This limitation was established in 1946 to prevent the intrusion of high commercial or industrial structures on the waterfront into the residential district at the top of the almost vertical eastern scarp of the hill.

105-foot Districts

The existing 105-foot district on Pacific Heights is retained and extended to include the tier of blocks and both the Van Ness Avenue and Polk Street frontages from the vicinity of Chestnut Street to Broadway. The boundary of this district between Green and Union Streets has generally been adjusted to the southern boundary of the Union Street commercial property. This limitation of height in the Van Ness-Polk corridor will prevent structures from rising above the crest of the Russian Hill ridge.

A 105-foot district is proposed along the upper reaches of the Russian Hill slopes above North Beach. This will provide a transition from the moderate heights permitted on the lower slopes to the structures which are reaching skyward at the top of the ridge.

Floor Area Ratio

It is recommended that building height on the Russian Hill ridge top be controlled by the floor area ratio formula or other height control provisions pertinent to each zone in the Planning Code. This will permit the continued construction of high buildings along the summit of the ridge in the R-4 and R-5 zones, and will limit the building height to 40-feet in the several pockets of the R-3 zoning on the high slopes of the hill.

Existing Special Height Limit Districts

The first special height limit district was established in the Building Code in 1927. Before that the height of buildings generally was limited only by structural considerations, which are regulated by the Building Code. The first 40-foot height control district which was enacted into the Building Code in 1927 was a function of the use of the land, rather than the construction of buildings. It was devised to control the intensity

of use in the district as well as the height of structures, but it was placed in the Building Code rather than in the zoning ordinance then in effect.

Several other special height control districts were enacted into the Building Code between 1927 and 1959. The successful application (ZM61.15) to establish a 40-foot height limit district by an amendment to the Planning Code was the first use of the new (1960) zoning ordinance for regulating heights in special districts.

The ordinance establishing this district added the new Section 214 to the Planning Code, recognizing that special height districts are a proper function of the Planning Code.

It is recommended that the special height districts presently existing in the Building Code be transferred to the new section 214 of the Planning Code, and that such further height control districts as may be established shall become a part of this section.

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